

“This is the Soul of Aruba Speaking”

The 1951 Campo Alegre Protest and Insular Identity on Aruba

Chelsea Shields*

Graduate Center, City University of New York, U.S.A.

cschields@gradcenter.cuny.edu

Abstract

In 1951, at the onset of major decolonization initiatives in the Netherlands Antilles, thousands of residents on Aruba successfully joined in protest to defeat Campo Alegre, a proposed brothel near the Aruban oil-refining city of San Nicolas. This article considers the protest movement within the context of Antillean decolonization and argues that debates over sexual politics played an important role in popularizing an Aruban identity separate from neighboring Curaçao—then seat of the government of the Netherlands Antilles and site of the first Campo Alegre brothel. Through analysis of Aruban archival sources, this article examines how the protest movement exploited decolonization policy while also drawing on the rhetoric of leading local political parties who claimed racial and cultural superiority to Curaçao.

Keywords

Aruba – Curaçao – decolonization – history – Netherlands Antilles – prostitution – sexual politics

In an exceptional visit to Aruba in May 1951, a reporter from *TIME* magazine observed an epic struggle that had recently beset this “arid, rust-colored

* For their incisive feedback on earlier versions of this article, I wish to thank James Dator, Evan Dawley, Kyle Francis, Dagmar Herzog, Matthew Hale, and participants at the 2015 Association of Caribbean Historians Conference in Nassau, Bahamas. I am grateful to Luc Alofs for generously sharing his knowledge on this episode in Aruban history, Nelson Thiel at the Archivo Nacional Aruba, who helped to locate key sources, and the two anonymous reviewers of the *NWIG* for their attentive reading and astute comments on this article.

Caribbean islet” and “colonial outpost of the Netherlands.” The struggle erupted on May 30, 1951 when “Virtue, cheered on by 3,000 righteous housewives, grappled with Vice, symbolized by 134 resentful prostitutes.”¹ This confrontation marked the climax in a series of protests against a proposed brothel near the Aruban port city of San Nicolas, galvanizing religious leaders, women’s organizations, and an unprecedented number of island residents in opposition against the so-called Campo Alegre, or the Happy Camp. The protest movement of 1951—measured in the strength of its numbers and its wide and consistent coverage in the Antillean press—tested fragile democratic institutions intended to transition Aruba from a Dutch “colonial outpost” into a modern democracy. At the same time, in both content and in form, the protest movement unfolded within the framework of Antillean decolonization. Specifically, the relationship between Aruba and Curaçao, its island neighbor and seat of the government of the Netherlands Antilles,² became a subject of urgent concern for the protest movement—not least because it was on Curaçao that the region’s first state-sanctioned brothel appeared two years earlier. In the protest movement of 1951, concerns over the arrival of a Curaçaoan-style Happy Camp thus became deeply entwined with the issue of national belonging on Aruba.

The extent of emotional energy invested in the protest movement raises the question of whether the longing for a “separate” Aruba had been channeled into a moral and social project rather than an expressly political one. By 1951, Aruban aspirations to separate from the Antillean constellation were thwarted by the enactment of decolonization measures that broadened democratic self-governance in the Netherlands Antilles but united the six Dutch Antillean islands under the seat of government in Willemstad, Curaçao. This outcome was a significant setback for hardline separatists like the Aruban People’s Party (Arubaanse Volkspartij, hereafter AVP), who sought independence not from the metropolitan Netherlands but from Curaçao. Yet, as the protests over the proposed Aruban Campo illustrate, deepening interisland tensions soon appeared in new theaters of public dialogue, in turn shifting the debates out of the halls of government and into church pews and city streets. As this

1 “A Problem of Two Professions,” *TIME*, June 18, 1951, n.p. All articles located in Biblioteca Nacional di Aruba (hereafter BNA), Departamento Arubiana/Caribiana (hereafter DAC), anonymous scrapbook. Where possible, page numbers have been retrieved via Delpher, <http://www.delpher.nl/>.

2 At the time of the protest in 1951, the Netherlands Antilles included six islands constituting four administrative territories. The islands of Curaçao, Aruba, and Bonaire formed three separate island territories (*eilandgebieden*), while the islands of St. Maarten, St. Eustatius, and Saba formed one administrative territory.

article demonstrates, the mass protest against Campo Alegre on Aruba was enabled by decolonization policies at the same time that it gave vent to ambivalent feelings of opportunity and anxiety evoked by these very measures.

This study is informed by and aims to contribute to two rich bodies of literature: histories of decolonization and postcolonial nation building and studies of sexuality and gender in the Caribbean. Histories of decolonization in the Dutch, British, and French Caribbean have broadened the scholarly view of the trajectory of decolonization, showing how anticolonial leaders pursued decolonization through reforming rather than severing ties with former metropolitan powers.³ Leaders in the Dutch Caribbean countries of the Netherlands Antilles and Suriname pursued such a path to decolonization, maintaining political ties with the Netherlands while attaining autonomy in governing internal affairs.⁴ Similarly, the architects of the British Commonwealth and French Union attempted to uphold the geographic boundaries of European empires while reforming the substance of political ties binding them (Collins 2013; Wilder 2015). As a number of recent studies have shown, however, these federal experiments often failed on account of the intensity of intercolonial rivalries (Cooper 2014b; Mawby 2012). Building on this literature, this study on Aruban nationalism seeks to illuminate how antagonism within and amongst former colonies—in this case between Aruba and neighboring Curaçao—could eclipse even the demand to reform bonds between metropole and colony.

Further, scholars of sexuality and gender in the Caribbean have helpfully expanded our view of the lived experience of decolonization, and, in partic-

3 Alofs 2011; Chamberlain 2010; Hillebrink 2008; Klinkers 1999; Mawby 2012; Oostindie & Klinkers 2001 and 2003; Oostindie 2005; Rush 2011; Van Galen 2013.

4 Formalized in the Charter (Statuut) of 1954, the Kingdom of the Netherlands included the countries of the Netherlands, the Netherlands Antilles, and Suriname. While the Netherlands Antilles and Suriname assumed responsibility for their country's internal governance, the Netherlands retained control over citizenship, defense, foreign policy, and the guarantee of good governance. Important changes to the structure of the Kingdom came in 1975, when Suriname achieved total independence from the Netherlands, and in 1986 when Aruba separated from the Netherlands Antilles and joined the Kingdom of the Netherlands as an autonomous constituent country. In 2010, after decades of disenchantment with the federal model and weak feelings of unity among the Antillean islands, the Netherlands Antilles dissolved. Curaçao and St. Maarten joined Aruba and the Netherlands as autonomous constituent countries of the Kingdom, while Bonaire, Saba, and St. Eustatius became special municipalities of the Netherlands. On the decolonization of the Netherlands Antilles, see footnote 3. On the decolonization and postcolonial history of Suriname, see Hoeft 2013 and Meel 1990.

ular, the ways in which emerging anti- and postcolonial nationalisms in the twentieth century conscripted men and women differently according to their gender, race, and class.⁵ Similarly, I view the intense discussions around sexual politics on Aruba in the 1950s within a constellation of equally passionate debates on the island's enduring relationship to Curaçao and the metropolitan Netherlands. As this article will demonstrate, protesters against Campo Alegre on Aruba embraced *and* redefined notions of a unique Aruban identity. In the process, participants in the Campo debate combined previously popularized ideas of the island's allegedly distinct racial heritage with new mandates for restrained sexual morality, reframing the boundaries of belonging on Aruba along the axes of race and sexual morality. Reading across literatures on the end of empire and on sexuality and gender in the Caribbean sheds light on the complexities of anticolonial nationalism and throws into sharp relief the ways in which ordinary citizens made sense of the dizzying changes of the decolonizing state.

This article thus highlights the protest movement's complex interactions with and contributions to prevailing ideas about decolonization. After surveying initial attempts to regulate prostitution during World War II and its immediate aftermath, I then analyze protest ephemera, press sources, and official documents produced at the height of the Campo protest in the spring and summer of 1951. First, I examine the protest movement's recurrent appeal to a distinctly Aruban identity and complementary assertions of moral and racial superiority to Curaçao. Second, I survey the ways in which the protest movement made strategic use of the emerging democratic channels of the postcolonial state, including, above all, the opportunities offered by the Kingdom's multitiered structure. Finally, I examine how the protest movement presented itself to and mobilized its supporters around the threat Campo ostensibly posed to marital bliss and domestic harmony. These messages, and the protest movement's attendant promise of moral integrity, resonated in a time of widespread change and uncertainty as the island's political future hung in the balance and the economy—centered on the once powerful oil refining industry—entered a phase of decline. As such, the extraordinary success of the protest movement was owed not to how the Campo question displaced attention from the island's political and economic future. Rather, the protest movement evoked incredible

5 On the history of Campo Alegre on Curaçao and for a brief overview of the Campo Alegre protest on Aruba, see Alofs 1993; Kempadoo 2004; and Kleijn & Schrover 2013. For other studies that consider debates about sexuality and gender in the context of economic and political change at the end of empire, see Agard-Jones 2012; Bourbonnais 2009; Briggs 2002; De Barros 2014; Moore & Johnson 2004; Neptune 2007; Sippial 2013; and Wekker 2006.

emotional energy precisely for the ways in which the Campo debate dynamically intersected with aspirations for increased autonomy, and the uncertainty and optimism born of this important moment in Antillean history.

Regulating Prostitution, 1942–1949

World War II drew the largest Dutch Antillean islands into roles of world-historical importance. The presence of oil refining industries on Curaçao and Aruba helped to fuel the Allied war effort, and the wartime boom in production brought both economic and demographic expansion to the islands. As Gert Oostindie and Inge Klinkers have argued, these developments contributed to a sense of optimism and self-confidence among Caribbean elites, who, at the war's end, pushed to reform ties with the metropolitan Netherlands (Oostindie & Klinkers 2004:68). Yet, the very conditions of growth and expansion that galvanized some Antillean leaders to seek greater autonomy from the Netherlands by the war's end also produced innumerable anxieties about the unmooring of traditional values and public morality. The growth of port industries in Willemstad in Curaçao and San Nicolas in Aruba drew thousands of largely single male contract laborers, sailors on cargo ships and oil tankers, and Dutch and U.S. marines to Antillean shores in the years during and immediately following the war (Kempadoo 1999:11). Officials connected this traffic—significant for the small islands of Curaçao and Aruba, whose populations totaled 105,000 and 55,000 in 1951 respectively—to the alarming rise in venereal disease and the alleged appearance of open and flourishing hedonism in the port environs (Alofs 2011:142; Van Soest 1977:649).

These developments troubled colonial and religious leadership alike. On both Curaçao and Aruba in the first half of the twentieth century, the Catholic Church occupied a central role in civic life. Although Protestantism, the religion of early Dutch colonists, remained the primary religion of governing elites into the twentieth century, Catholicism had long been the majority religion of residents on Curaçao and Aruba. With the arrival of missionaries from the Dominican order in the nineteenth century, key institutions such as education and health care came under the auspices of the Catholic Church and remained under Catholic control until the 1950s (Alofs 2011:45–46; Groenewoud 2014:61–62). When colonial policy-makers on Curaçao attempted to address the perceived sexual needs of the island's population of single males, they solicited the opinion and involvement of the Catholic Church in finding a solution. In 1942, a five-man committee, including members of the colonial government and two Catholic priests, convened to study the island's prostitution problem and

advise colonial administrators based on its findings.⁶ This committee called on the police and health departments of both Curaçao and Aruba to supervise prostitution and sequester commercial sex within tolerated zones and hotels (Kempadoo 2004:92). Upholding a statute introduced by the Dutch governor in 1936, the committee also endorsed the continued licensing of foreign sex workers hailing largely from Colombia, Venezuela, and the Dominican Republic (Alofs 1993:21). Together with other regulationist measures, this imperative aimed to protect the chastity of local womanhood and public virtue.⁷

This loose system of regulation was ultimately introduced on both Curaçao and Aruba in 1944 as an amendment to the earlier regulation of contagious diseases (Kempadoo 2004:92). Within a year, however, local officials on Curaçao complained that the measures had done little to improve flagrant displays of public immorality and decrease the prevalence of venereal disease. New proposals issued in 1945 advocated for the centralization of prostitution in a single destination away from Willemstad's commercial and residential centers. In 1949, these plans became a reality when the first Campo Alegre opened its doors on the site of a former military encampment near Curaçao's Hato airport. Only foreign women were permitted to enter and work in this sprawling compound—to this day the largest open-air brothel in the world—after registering with the police and obtaining a certificate of good health from medical authorities (Kleijn & Schrover 2013:39–40). Although this more interventionist system promised to sanitize downtown Willemstad, Campo Alegre directly contravened Articles 259 and 260 of the Antillean criminal code. These statutes prohibited the facilitation of prostitution by a third party and banned brothels—a peculiar situation for colonial officials, as Mariëlle Kleijn and Marlou Schrover have argued, who subsequently assumed the role of pimp in a government-run brothel (Kleijn & Schrover 2013). Neither articles in the Antillean penal code nor their Dutch antecedents, however, outlawed prostitution or criminalized the prostitute (Kempadoo 2004; Mooij 1998; De Vries 1997).

6 Archivo Nacional Aruba (hereafter ANA), Archief van het Bestuurscollege van het Eilandgebied Aruba (hereafter BCAR) 1951–1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid 1939–1950, DS-606–6, recommendations of the Committee to Combat Prostitution and Venereal Disease, October 14, 1942.

7 While Curaçao and Aruba were unique in their state-led recruitment of foreign sex workers, the idea that regulated prostitution helped to protect national morality and male sexual health emerges frequently among other regulation campaigns in the Americas. For more on efforts to regulate prostitution and the connection between sexual morality and nationalism in these regions, see Alexander 1994; Bliss 2001; Caulfield 1997; Findlay 1999; Guy 1991; McCreery 1986; Sippial 2013.

On Aruba, meanwhile, the regulations of 1944 and contradictory injunctions in the Antillean criminal code had created a peculiar situation in San Nicolas, site of the prosperous U.S.-owned Lago Oil and Transport Company. Although authorities permitted foreign prostitutes to establish temporary residence in the hotels *Hija del Dia* and *Hollywood*, the ban on third-party facilitation and brothel-keeping prohibited sex workers from entertaining clients in hotel chambers.⁸ As a result, commercial sex had become a public spectacle. By 1950, authorities complained of the scandalous situation on the island's eastern shores, where hired taxis shuttled public women and their customers from the center of the city to the outlying beaches of *Smal* and *Juana Morto*.⁹ Mounting concerns over public prostitution on Aruba and the recent opening of Curaçao's *Campo* empowered some officials on Aruba to attempt to remove immoral acts from public view.

On June 4, 1949, José María Debrot, owner of the hotel *Hija del Dia* requested a permit to build a "hotel" intended exclusively for a "certain category of women."¹⁰ Debrot's proposed establishment would house sixty rooms and a restaurant serving residents and their guests. Unlike Debrot's *Hija del Dia*, this new establishment—dubbed *Campo Alegre* by its supporters and eventual detractors—would openly facilitate paid sexual encounters on the complex's grounds. In his proposal to Aruban authorities, Debrot strategically emphasized his desire to "move the guests from the heart of San Nicolas beyond the city limit, contributing to the social welfare of the island."¹¹

Ironically, it was Debrot's intent to shield the Aruban public from immoral acts that triggered significant popular outcry. In March 1951, as Aruban officials and civil servants repeatedly failed to find a suitable location for Debrot's *Campo*, a number of housewives in San Nicolas caught wind of the looming plans. Under the leadership of president Clarita Villaba and secretary Marianita Chong of the Roman Catholic Women's League (*R.K. Vrouwenbond*) of San

8 ANA, BCAR 1951–1961, *Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid*, invr. nr. 544, DS-606–6, minutes of the second meeting of the Committee to Study Prostitution, July 13, 1951. According to this report, hotel owners coordinated with travel agencies in Colombia and Venezuela and the Dutch consulate and KLM operator in Santo Domingo to provide short-term visas permitting foreign women to work on Aruba for periods of four to six weeks.

9 ANA, BCAR 1951–1961, *Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid*, invr. nr. 544, DS-606–6, minutes of the second meeting of the Committee to Study Prostitution, July 13, 1951.

10 ANA, BCAR 1951–1961, *Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid*, invr. nr. 347, DS-13468, request for hotel license by José María Debrot, June 4, 1949.

11 ANA, BCAR, 1951–1961, *Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid*, invr. nr. 347, DS-13468, letter from J.M. Debrot to Mr. Pauw, September 17, 1949.

Nicolas, a self-styled protest committee began to draw attention to the troubling specter of a brothel planned just “a short distance from a residential area, very close by the houses of good Aruban families with many children and who deserve to provide those children with a good upbringing.”¹² Throughout the spring and summer of 1951, religious women’s organizations allied with leaders of Christian churches on Aruba to mobilize thousands of island residents—the majority of them women—in protest against the island government and Campo Alegre. Their aim was not only to prevent a Campo Alegre from arriving on Aruba, but also to abolish prevailing systems of regulation. Such measures, they insisted, flouted Christian principles and both Antillean and Dutch law. Moreover, the presence of a brothel on Aruba, they asserted, ran contrary to the Aruban people’s principles and mores.

Curaçao’s “Worthless Example”

In their confrontations with Antillean authorities in the spring and summer of 1951, leaders of the protest movement sought to defend Aruban families and public morality from government-sanctioned sin. While other scholars have commented upon the religiosity of the protest movement, none have remarked upon how the movement’s professed Catholicism and restrained sexual morality became deeply imbricated within notions of a discrete insular identity (Alofs 1993:31; Kleijn & Schrover 2013:46). Protest leadership and various sympathizers identified Curaçao as the antithesis to Aruba’s emerging island identity—not least because it was on Curaçao that the region’s first Campo Alegre came to exist. In this way, the Campo debate on Aruba became a powerful means for repudiating Curaçao and, in the process, advancing notions of a distinctly Aruban identity.

The Aruban identity popularized by commentators within the Campo debate was marked not only by the island’s supposed moral superiority, but also by the alleged racial superiority of Arubans to Curaçaoans. As I will later discuss, nationalist politicians on Aruba insisted that the island’s unique ethnic heritage set it apart from other Antillean islands (Alofs 2011). These actors called on the island’s large mestizo population—the descendants of early European colonists and Amerindians from South America—as the “real” Arubans. Until the arrival of the oil refining industry in the early twentieth century,

12 ANA, BCAR 1951–1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, invr. nr. 347, DS-13474, correspondence to Lt. Governor, March 12, 1951.

Aruba's population remained relatively homogenous owing to the absence of plantation slavery and the island's isolation (Koot & Ringeling 1984:29). By contrast, on Curaçao the Dutch West India Company established the bustling port city of Willemstad as a center of the Atlantic slave trade in the seventeenth century. Over two centuries of reliance on the enslaved labor of people of African descent on Curaçao thus differed substantially from the historical trajectory of Aruba, where the number of enslaved never totaled higher than 600 (Alofs 2011:40–41). By the twentieth century, African-Caribbeans formed the majority population group on Curaçao and a growing minority on Aruba, as thousands of primarily African-Caribbean laborers came to work in the oil refining industry (Alofs & Merckies 1990:102). Although the image of Aruba as a mestizo society and of Curaçao as an African-Caribbean society is a simplistic one that belies the diversity of both islands by the mid-twentieth century,¹³ some politicians on Aruba nevertheless succeeded in popularizing this reductive understanding of Aruban belonging, and which, as I will later demonstrate, inflected the tenor of the protest against Campo Alegre.

For some among the protest movement, the mere fact of the movement's existence separated Aruba from Curaçao. One Catholic priest on Aruba, whose fastidious collection of press clippings, pamphlets, posters, and correspondence forms an important source base for this study, reflected in the opening pages of his scrapbook: "What is incredible is that Aruban women ... have continued to protest, because this does not fit within the history of the Antilles. While on Curaçao no one raised their voice in protest when a brothel was built with the approval of the administration ... on Aruba the government has now been forced to search for another location for the second time."¹⁴ Similarly, an article in the consistently sympathetic Catholic newspaper, *Amigoe di Curaçao*, observed:

Aruba lies somewhere on the earth off the coast of Venezuela, a small pile of rocks tossed from God's creating hand. What can we do? ... Not much. We lie between lands that can trample us. Economically speaking, the question of our survival depends on Lago. We are practically dependent on others for everything. But it is a fact that this small, precious and eternally loved little island has its own mentality and character. We will not discuss Curaçao, which accepted a Campo and foreign prostitutes

13 Sizeable communities of Javanese, Chinese, Europeans, Surinamese and other Caribbean and Latin American nationalities, and Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews resided on Curaçao and Aruba by the mid-twentieth century.

14 BNA, DAC, anonymous scrapbook, unpublished text, n.d. p. 4.

without protest. Curaçao must figure that out on its own. Our ideas are different: we do not want a Campo!¹⁵

For this commentator, Aruba's homegrown moral tradition was all the more remarkable precisely because of the island's political and economic dependence. In view of Aruba's reliance on foreign industry and its marginal role on the international stage, the island's autonomous moral character emerged as its most distinctive and celebrated trait.

While these authors indicted the complicity of the Curaçaoan public in the Campo question, other opponents of the brothel explicitly placed blame for Aruba's emerging troubles on Curaçao. The Antillean press became an important tool for bringing this message to the public, and in newspapers such as *Amigoe di Curaçao*, numerous sympathizers railed against their island neighbor. The paper's opinion pages commonly accused Curaçao's leaders, who had flouted the law with impunity, for encouraging a haughty sense of disregard among Aruban officials. One author opined, "what is yet more unbelievable is that fact that the government of Aruba stood very strongly because it was supported by Curaçao, which has illegally had a Campo Alegre since 1949."¹⁶ Repeatedly, opponents of Campo Alegre questioned why Aruba must follow Curaçao "when it has offered such a worthless example."¹⁷

Curaçao loomed large in the protest movement's rhetoric not only because the island housed the first Campo Alegre. The opening of the brothel in 1949 and its exclusive admittance of foreign sex workers from Latin America and the Hispanic Caribbean had evidently forced some local prostitutes to search for new clientele on Aruba.¹⁸ Police reports from the late 1940s and early 1950s cited the troubling increase in the number of Antillean prostitutes on Aruba, among whom the "Curaçaoan element predominated."¹⁹ Indeed, forty-four of the island's seventy-five registered prostitutes in 1951 originated from Curaçao.

15 "Aruba's vrouwen zeggen: Wij willen geen buitenlandse prostitue's," *Amigoe di Curaçao*, November 13, 1951, p. 5.

16 BNA, DAC, anonymous scrapbook, unpublished text, n.d., p. 7.

17 ANA, BCAR 1951–1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, invr. nr. 347, DS-13474, correspondence to Lt. Governor, March 12, 1951.

18 ANA, BCAR, 1951–1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, invr. nr. 544, DS-606–6, report following the departure of foreign prostitutes by Hendrik Cornelis Willemsen, Police Commissioner on Aruba, May 12, 1955.

19 ANA, BCAR, 1951–1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, invr. nr. 544, DS-606–6, report following the departure of foreign prostitutes by Hendrik Cornelis Willemsen, Police Commissioner on Aruba, May 12, 1955.

Meanwhile, police reported that until August 1951 there were "as good as no Aruban prostitutes" on Aruba.²⁰ Thus, both officials and protesters perceived prostitution to be a largely "foreign" affair. What made the perceived threat of Curaçao so acute, however, was that Curaçao was a *domestic* Other in a position of political authority, bonded unevenly to Aruba through common citizenship, government, and the freedom of movement among the Dutch Antillean islands.

Commentators on all sides of the Campo debate routinely racialized Curaçaoan sex workers and claimed that the alleged undesirability of Afro-Curaçaoan prostitutes served as the primary justification for continued reliance on "white foreign women."²¹ After the mass demonstrations in San Nicolas and the capital city of Oranjestad at the end of May, a subject to which I later return, Antillean authorities called for the formation of a committee to study prostitution on Aruba. The Antillean Attorney General and the committee's chairman, J.J.A. Ellis, dismissed an unusual proposition to "import" exclusively Curaçaoan sex workers, claiming, "these Curaçaoan women would not satisfy the demand, and would therefore cause problems for the white women of Aruba. The local [Curaçaoan] prostitutes are black."²² Ellis thus made a cautious argument for the continued tolerance of foreign prostitutes by insisting that male sexual needs would threaten Aruba's "white" females should clients be denied access to light-skinned sex workers.

Members of the protest movement, however, retorted that the sexual availability of white foreign women only made prostitution more appealing. In a letter to the editor of *Amigoe di Curaçao*, one author opined,

one whispers that the foreign prostitutes must come as the indigenous are not sufficient because of their color. If there are no foreigners then

20 Statistics on the number of prostitutes from Curaçao are cited in ANA, BCAR 1951–1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, invr. nr. 544, DS-606–6, minutes of the second meeting of the Committee to Study Prostitution, July 13, 1951. The statement on the absence of Aruban prostitutes, which is most likely exaggerated, is found in ANA, BCAR 1951–1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, invr. nr. 544, DS-606–6, report following the departure of foreign prostitutes by Hendrik Cornelis Willemsen, Police Commissioner on Aruba, May 12, 1955.

21 Scholars of Campo Alegre on Curaçao have argued that the recruitment of foreign prostitutes was intended primarily to protect local womanhood (Kempadoo 2004; Kleijn & Schrover 2013). By contrast, Aruban officials in 1951 largely assumed that Aruban women would not become prostitutes, and thus deemed necessary the continued licensing of foreign women in order to satisfy consumer demand for light-skinned women.

22 ANA, BCAR 1951–1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, invr. nr. 544, DS-606–6, minutes of the third meeting of the Committee to Study Prostitution, July 26, 1951.

the indigenous will be sufficient; they will only become busier. Men will take what they can even if they prefer the white foreigners. The traffic in foreign prostitutes makes a choice possible and the sin more attractive.²³

While sex workers were routinely racialized, a move that simultaneously served to “whiten” the Aruban population and equate this whiteness with chastity, the race of male clientele received little attention. Although many police and medical experts on Aruba contended that itinerant sailors and local men patronized prostitutes in equal numbers, the diversity among both of these groups renders the racial identification of clients—as in most instances—highly problematic.²⁴ What is salient in this exchange between governing officials and the protest movement, however, is the extent to which the protest movement succeeded in setting the terms of the debate. In a new atmosphere of representative politics, officials scrambled to defend their actions in the language of the protest movement itself, invoking the danger of prostitution to public morality and, more troublingly, racial purity.

A minority voice on Aruba also deployed the threat of racial danger—this time as a way to indict the shortsightedness of the protest movement. Nearly one year after the mass demonstrations of May 1951, the San Nicolas circular *Chuchubi* ran the headline, “Curaçao vs. Aruba: *Barbuletas* [butterflies] vs. *Chinchurias* [whores].”²⁵ The article denounced the protest movement and the island government’s subsequent decision in August 1951 to deport foreign prostitutes:

Did you all anticipate as you marched through the streets in opposition to the *barbuletas* that this situation would cause a migration of prostitutes from Curaçao to Aruba? Did the administration consider ... that a national migration would occur on Aruba? Did the island council consider when they protested against the “butterflies” that Curaçao would remain and give their whores permission to plant themselves on Aruba?²⁶

23 “Aruba’s vrouwen zeggen: Wij willen geen buitenlandse prostituees,” *Amigoe di Curaçao*, November 13, 1951, p. 5.

24 ANA, BCAR 1951–1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, invr. nr. 544, DS-606–6, minutes of the second meeting of the Committee to Study Prostitution, July 13, 1951.

25 *Chuchubi*, July 30, 1952. When authorities translated this article into Dutch, they qualified the term *chinchurias* with “dirty, filthy street hookers” (*vieze vuile straatmeiden*). ANA, BCAR 1951–1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, invr. nr. 347, DS-13477–10.

26 *Chuchubi*, July 30, 1952.

Evidently it was not enough for certain critics of the protest movement to attack the implausibility or naïve idealism of a strictly abolitionist approach. Instead, these critics invoked racialized stereotypes of Curaçao sex workers to argue that the abolition of foreign prostitution on Aruba had done more to threaten rather than protect the island.

These comments highlight a central and problematic feature of the Aruban identity popularized in the 1940s, and one that some leaders integrated into their pleas to separate from Curaçao: Aruba's whitened racial identity in contrast to that of Curaçao. As Luc Alofs has argued, the formation of the Aruban People's Party (AVP) in 1942 did much to popularize notions of a unique ethnic Aruban identity and located the nation's founding myth in the marriage between European colonists and indigenous Amerindians (Alofs 2011:256). The popular maxim of the AVP, "Aruba for Arubans," was as much anti-Curaçaoan and as it was anti-immigrant—a fearful expression of the island's inferior status to Curaçao and a defensive backlash against the economic marginalization of local workers. By 1948, roughly 40 percent of Lago's 8,262 employees hailed from the Anglophone Caribbean, and thus thousands of predominantly African-Caribbean laborers formed the backbone of the island's most important industry (Alofs & Merkies 1990:102–3). While the AVP's nativist and xenophobic rhetoric rallied electoral majorities in the days of limited franchise, the broadening of the franchise and the organization of immigrants in associational clubs and political parties ultimately created increased competition for the AVP by 1951 (Alofs 2011:229). Although the protest movement did not explicitly align itself with any political party, its equation of outsiders with moral degradation, and the concomitant defense of a unique Aruban character, in many ways reflect the AVP's rhetorical strategies. Adding to and drawing upon prevailing discourses of Aruban separateness, the protest movement combined a restrained sexual morality with racially coded understandings of Aruban belonging.

This pattern of racialization on Aruba stands in contrast to emerging categories of racial difference on Curaçao in the 1950s. As Kamala Kempadoo has noted, Campo's practice of inviting light-skinned Latin sex workers to Curaçao to the exclusion of local women of largely African descent has resulted in the production of "categories of womanhood ... that distinguished between decent, domesticated local women and loose, exotic disruptive hypersexual Others" (Kempadoo 2004:110). The stereotyped image of the "SanDom" on Curaçao—typically understood as an unruly Latin sex worker—thus serves as a contrast to appropriate Afro-Curaçaoan femininity. On Aruba in the early 1950s, however, and despite the number of foreign prostitutes from Latin America, commentators on the Campo question repeatedly connected Afro-Curaçaoan

women with sexual chaos and moral disorder, a discourse that simultaneously served to “whiten” Aruban women. As Ann Stoler has argued, such racial, sexual, and class discourses powerfully map “the moral parameters of the nation” (Stoler 1995:7). Through discussion of prostitution and sexual politics, a range of actors became engaged in these efforts. Despite sometimes diverging opinion on the Campo question, these actors ultimately converged in their belief in Aruban separateness. While scholars have long noted the imbrication of gender, race, and class within understandings of nationalism, what bears stating in the Aruban example is that none among the chorus of voices expressed support for territorial sovereignty based on the familiar nation-state model. The articulation of a distinct and separate Aruban identity—saturated though it was by familiar markers of race, gender, and class—thus became an urgent project not in spite of its enduring connections to Curaçao, the broader Dutch Antilles, and the former colonial metropole, but precisely because of these revitalized multinational ties. It is to this subject that I now turn.

Leveraging the Kingdom

The protest movement owed its extraordinary efficacy in part to fortuitous timing. Sweeping decolonization policy enacted in 1951 democratized the bodies of Antillean governance and made space for the participation of citizens in civic life. While other scholars claim that participants of the Campo protest were motivated primarily by their religious idealism, the emphasis on the protest movement’s religious orientation overlooks the ways in which the movement and its supporters engaged with and navigated the politics of local, national, and Kingdom-wide governance (Alofs 1993; Kleijn & Schrover 2013). The protest movement availed itself in particular of constitutional changes that asserted the authority of Kingdom and national governments over local island administrations in the Antilles. Indeed, somewhat paradoxically, even as the protest movement advanced notions of a separate Aruban identity, they simultaneously leveraged Aruba’s nonsovereign political status to solicit intervention from authorities in Willemstad and The Hague.

As other scholars have recently pointed out, this kind of “layered sovereignty” emerged in the 1940s–50s as an attractive alternative to revolutionary anticolonial nationalism and territorial sovereignty premised on the national state.²⁷ While recent scholarship is right to highlight the ingenuity of these

27 Cooper 2008:168; see also Bonilla 2013 and 2015; Collins 2013; Cooper 2014a and b; Daily 2014; Finch-Boyer 2013; Foray 2014; Mawby 2012; Wilder 2005 and 2015.

multinational states, what has received comparatively less attention is the rather unglamorous and quotidian ways in which political elites and popular classes negotiated and made sense of the often opaque linkages between local, national, and Kingdom-wide governance. As such, these early years of reform were pregnant with both problems and possibilities, on the one hand producing innumerable frictions between various governing organs and personnel unsure of the scope of their authority, and on the other hand offering tremendous latitude for political improvisation while also making accessible multiple channels for airing grievances and seeking redress. It was into this maelstrom of optimism and uncertainty that the debate over the Campo Alegre brothel emerged.

The protest movement's strategy of leveraging the governing bodies of the Kingdom was enabled by the introduction of the Interim Regulation (*Interimregeling*) of February 1951 and the proclamation of the Island Regulations of the Netherlands Antilles (*Eilandenregeling Nederlandse Antillen*, hereafter ERNA) in March 1951. While earlier regulations in 1939 and 1948 introduced the basic principles of democratic self-governance to the Netherlands Antilles, including freedom of the press, the creation of a national parliament and, crucially, the introduction of universal franchise, the Interim Regulation and ERNA strengthened the democratic structures of the state and clarified the relationship between the national government and the Dutch crown, and between local island administrations and the national government. Specifically, the Interim Regulation of 1951 strengthened the position of the Antillean Parliament, known as the Estates (*Staten*), which assumed primary responsibility for formulating the laws and regulations governing internal affairs in the Netherlands Antilles.²⁸ The increased authority of the national parliament stripped the governor of the Netherlands Antilles—previously appointed by the Dutch crown—of many of the executive's duties and made the position responsible to an Antillean council of ministers.²⁹ However, several important functions remained with the governor. In the governor's capacity as symbolic head of the national government, the governor retained the power to dissolve and hold

28 The twenty-two members of the Antillean Parliament were chosen by universal franchise. Voting publics on Curaçao elected twelve of the twenty-two seats, while, in a major defeat for Aruban nationalist parties—who aimed to achieve parity in seat distribution—Aruban residents elected eight members of parliament. The remaining two seats were to be chosen by Bonaire and by St. Maarten, St. Eustatius, and Saba collectively.

29 These ministers were appointed by the Antillean Parliament, and were responsible to the parliament. As such, after 1951, the governor no longer exercised any independent authority.

new elections in parliament, and, in his role as representative of the Kingdom government in the Netherlands Antilles, the governor could reject any ordinance deemed contrary to the mutual interests of the Kingdom.³⁰ In this way, though the national government exercised autonomy in internal affairs, its status within the Kingdom of the Netherlands ensured the ongoing intervention of the Netherlands in issues of mutual interest to the Kingdom countries (Oostindie & Klinkers 2001:116–17).

Quickly following the enactment of the Interim Regulation, the royal proclamation of the ERNA on March 14, 1951 expanded the autonomy of each of the island territories and placed a range of administrative responsibilities under the control of a local island administration. Daily management over the affairs of each island territory rested in the Administrative College formed by a lt. governor, who served as the college's chairman, and several deputies selected by the Island Council (eilandsraad), whose members were popularly elected and served four-year terms.³¹ Yet, while the autonomy of each island territory certainly expanded through the ERNA, the regulations of national and Kingdom governments remained superior. According to the terms of the ERNA, each island territory was obliged to cooperate in the implementation of national regulations or decrees and the lt. governor, whose primary task was to determine whether island regulations came into conflict with national or Kingdom-wide agreements, would be appointed by the Dutch crown.³² As such, island administrators answered to the bodies of national and Kingdom governance.

30 If a governor deemed any national law or ordinance contrary to the mutual interests of the Kingdom, the Dutch crown would then review and make a decision on the case. Further, as representative of the Kingdom government, the governor was obliged to consider the advice of the Dutch crown.

31 While the ERNA did not stipulate which subjects would be considered "island affairs," the document did detail those areas that fell beyond the scope of island territory jurisdictions. Generally, the ERNA restricted island territories from interfering in regulations that applied uniformly to the whole country, including subjects related to "civil and commercial law, civil procedure, criminal law, criminal procedure, notaries, the law in administrative litigation and tax matters, as well as the composition and powers of the judiciary." For the full text see, "Koninklijk Besluit van 3 Maart 1951, houdende de eilandenregeling Nederlandse Antillen," Overheid.nl, http://decentrale.regelgeving.overheid.nl/cvdr/XHTMLoutput/Historie/Nederlandse%20Antillen/7402/7402_1.html, accessed March 10, 2015.

32 Oostindie & Klinkers 2001:117–19. Should the lt. governor deem any island regulation in conflict with national or Kingdom-wide agreements, he must then refer the matter to the governor for resolution.

The protest movement displayed a sophisticated knowledge of these emerging governing structures. Nearly all major petitions and declarations by the two primary arms of the protest movement—one led by religious women's organizations and the other by religious leaders—were sent simultaneously to local authorities, national officials in the Antillean capital, and governing organs in the Netherlands. Initially, protesters addressed their petitions to the Lt. governor of Aruba, who responded to the nascent protest movement by simultaneously attempting to relocate the proposed brothel further away from residential areas *and* quietly accelerating plans to finalize the building of the brothel. On May 16, 1951, acting Governor of the Netherlands Antilles F.A. Jas—an unelected official appointed by the Dutch monarch—signed a national decree approving the lease of 17,000 square meters of government land to N.V. Pereira and J.M. Debrot.³³ Although Debrot and his allies in government agreed not to discuss the lease, within ten days word had leaked to the public. In the week following this revelation, the protest movement publicized their cause in the Netherlands and on Curaçao.³⁴ In a series of telegrams dispatched on the day of mass demonstrations in Oranjestad, protest leaders Villaba and Chong jetisoned moral arguments and instead drew attention to Campo's infraction of two Antillean and metropolitan laws: those prohibiting the facilitation of prostitution by a third party and the ban on brothels. In two telegrams addressed to the governor of the Netherlands Antilles in his dual capacity as head of the national government and representative of the Kingdom in Curaçao, Villaba and Chong called for the "restoration and enforcement of Curaçaoan law regarding prostitution," while also urgently requesting that the governor notify "higher authorities in the Netherlands."³⁵ Villaba and Chong then took matters into their own hands, issuing a telegram directly to Queen Juliana of the Netherlands requesting the enforcement of Dutch law to ensure "no tolerance

33 ANA, BCAR 1951–1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, invr. nr. 347, DS-13468, national decree, May 16, 1951.

34 Early correspondence from the Roman Catholic Women's League and the Catholic association Liga di Maria in March 1951 to Lt. Governor Kwartzs lays bare this initial strategy. Villaba and Chong of the Women's League pledged, "We Aruban women and mothers take this issue to heart ... and will put pressure on the situation and continue to speak loudly so that we might be supported by all those in the Netherlands who hold dear Christian principles and respectability," ANA, BCAR 1951–1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, invr. nr. 347, DS-13474, correspondence to Lt. Governor, March 12, 1951.

35 BNA, DAC, anonymous scrapbook, telegrams from Clarita Villaba and Marianita Chong to the Governor of the Netherlands Antilles as Head of the National Government and to the Governor of the Netherlands Antilles as Koninkrijksorgaan, May 30, 1951.

for foreign prostitutes, no tolerance for public lechery.”³⁶ While it is unclear whether protesters expected much from these appeals, the protest movement nevertheless availed itself of the hierarchical nature of the Kingdom.

The mass demonstrations against Campo Alegre at the end of May significantly altered the previously dismissive attitude of local administrators and compelled a range of elected parliamentarians to involve themselves in the Campo debate. On May 30, 1951, thousands of people—the vast majority of them women—marched to government offices in Oranjestad demanding the reversal of the national decree. Sympathetic onlookers described this event as an unparalleled historic occasion and celebrated the protest’s democratic spirit of inclusion. While the leadership of the protest movement included largely middle-class women, the nearly 3,000 people who protested in the streets of Oranjestad and San Nicolas at the end of May drew a wider cross-section of society into the Campo debate.³⁷ One author observed, “old and young, mother, partner, betrothed, from all walks of life, gathered ... to defend husbands, young men, and fiancés against the attack of money-minded people who make a vile profit by taking away the most precious of what God gave to women in his unending overflowing love.”³⁸ For some, the protest was not simply an outpouring of faith but a deeply spiritual experience. One commentator pointed to the contrast between the protest movement’s modest tactics—a hodge-podge of homemade signs attached to broomsticks and riddled with Dutch spelling errors, a testament to the humble social status of the protesters—and its striking moral uprightness: “this was the instinctive response of 500 years of Christendom ... you looked and you felt a strange lump in your throat: this was the soul of Aruba speaking.”³⁹

Officials scrambled to respond to the protest. Members of parties who had been elected to represent Aruba in the Antillean government, and whose parties had much to lose if they did not neutralize the conflict before Aruba’s

36 BNA, DAC, anonymous scrapbook, telegram from Clarita Villaba and Marianita Chong to Her Majesty Juliana Queen of the Netherlands, May 30, 1951.

37 As Kleijn and Schrover (2013:45) point out, clergy in all of the churches on Aruba preached against the brothel on May 27, which undoubtedly played a role in rallying thousands to the protest. While they are right to highlight the role of the clergy in organizing protesters, records in Aruban archives show that the earliest complaints received by the local administration came from the women who eventually led the protest movement, see footnote 34.

38 “Nog een overpeinzing over het Campo Alegre op Aruba,” *Amigoe di Curaçao*, June 1, 1951, p. 3.

39 *Amigoe di Curaçao*, June 1, 1951, p. 3.

first-ever Island Council election in June, seized the opportunity to placate protesters and redeem their own tarnished reputations. Yet, as politicians competed amongst each other to claim the moral high ground for themselves and their respective parties, confusion emerged about the scope of local authority to initiate or reverse the policy on prostitution and the accountability between island and national branches of government. On June 1, 1951 the Antillean Parliament declared the national decree a "political mistake" and approved the formation of a committee to study prostitution in San Nicolas.⁴⁰ Aruban parliamentarians in particular rushed to revise their position on Campo in view of the fast-approaching Island Council election. AVP leader Henny Eman circulated pamphlets claiming that he never supported the brothel. Instead, Eman maintained he had only approved of the building of a cabaret.⁴¹ The Minister of Justice of the Netherlands Antilles and fellow AVP member W.F.M. Lampe came under especially heavy criticism because of rumors that Debrot funded his political campaign.⁴² Lampe swiftly proposed new regulations to the Antillean parliament that prohibited both the licensing of foreign prostitutes and the registration of domestic sex workers.⁴³ It was acting Dutch Governor Jas, however, whose dramatic change of heart secured the victory of the protest movement. In a theatrical speech on June 19, 1951, Jas declared the Campo question a matter of the past, vowing that no Campo would be built on the island. Additionally, Jas ordered the repeal of licenses for foreign prostitutes and prohibited further "importation" of foreign women. Embracing the protest movement's nationalist rhetoric, he concluded his speech stating, "I call on the Aruban people to continue with me, and soon, with the chosen island administration, to fight against prostitution."⁴⁴

While the protest movement welcomed Jas's measures with gratitude, some of his colleagues in the Antillean government felt that he had overstepped his authority and violated the government's democratic principles. In particular, Prime Minister of the Netherlands Antilles Dr. M.F.da Costa Gomez claimed that Jas's actions showed a "disregard for parliamentary tradition" and faulted

40 "Voorzetting Statenvergadering over Campo Alegre: Dr. Goslinga verdedigt C.A. met de Bijbel," *Amigoe di Curaçao*, June 2, 1951, p. 1.

41 "Nog een overpeinzing over het Campo Alegre op Aruba," *Amigoe di Curaçao*, June 1, 1951, p. 3.

42 "Politieke Overpeinzing," *Amigoe di Curaçao*, May 29, 1951, p. 3.

43 "Landsminister W. Lampe legt verklaring af inzake Campo Alegre," *Beurs- en Nieuwsberichten*, June 25, 1951, n.p.

44 "Bij Aruba begint de Victorie: Mr. Jas neemt dramatische maatregelen tegen Campo," *Amigoe di Curaçao*, June 20, 1951, p. 1.

Jas's controversial interpretation of the Interim Regulation.⁴⁵ Lampe likewise challenged Jas's authority and insisted his own regulations should take precedence over the acting governor's. Indeed, Lampe's measures dated two days earlier than those of Jas but had not reached Oranjestad in time to redeem the minister of Justice.⁴⁶

Undoubtedly, the political changes of 1951 increased the accountability of officials to their constituents and opened a range of venues in which protesters could seek redress at the same time that they offered politicians a new degree of latitude. Though some protesters adeptly navigated state structures to press for the restoration of law and morality, the nature of these reformed political bonds—especially those between Curaçao and Aruba—also provoked feelings of anxiety and uncertainty. Taken together, the anti-Curaçaoan sentiment of the protest movement and the strategic leveraging of the Kingdom's multitiered structure are remarkable not least for how they conform to prevailing aspirations for decolonization. This is perhaps most evident in the seemingly ubiquitous assertion—shared by some of Campo's elite supporters in the AVP and its most virulent detractors in the protest movement—that Aruban identity was distinct from and under threat by Curaçao and thus deserved special protection from the Netherlands. Yet, the protest movement often appealed to the legislative authority of Curaçao over Aruba in an attempt to halt the development of a Campo Alegre, thus exploiting federal connections even as they denounced the problematic precedent of Curaçao's Campo. More still, the pursuit of *external* intervention by governing authorities in Curaçao and the Netherlands misrecognized (perhaps strategically) the locus of the Campo question. Dutch colonial authorities who had been instrumental in advocating for regulated prostitution on Curaçao and in establishing that island's government-run brothel did not become the target of the protest movement's censure. Instead, the protest movement's assumptions about blame and accountability in the Campo affair reflected in many ways local political ambition to sever ties with Curaçao and the remaining Dutch Antillean islands and in its place strengthen bonds with the Netherlands.

45 "Het nieuws van vandaag," *Amigoe di Curaçao*, June 21, 1951, p. 1.

46 "Landsminister W. Lampe legt verklaring af inzake Campo Alegre," *Beurs- en Nieuwsberichten*, June 25, 1951, n.p.

The Promise of Morality

The protests against Campo Alegre on Aruba drew thousands of island residents into public demonstration. While neighborhood, familial, and religious networks undoubtedly did much to rally upwards of three thousand island residents against state-regulated prostitution, the protest movement's repeated emphasis on the vulnerability of domestic stability galvanized some supporters around Campo's threat to household harmony and reflected broader ambivalence and uncertainty about the sweeping political and economic changes of the 1940s–50s.

The posters and pamphlets of the protest movement offer insight into how the movement addressed itself to and mobilized its supporters. Written predominantly in Papiamentu, posters circulated in San Nicolas contained messages such as "Women of Aruba! Protest against the danger that awaits your husband or boyfriend!" and "Women of Aruba! Come forth for your family. A Campo Alegre is destructive to your domestic peace."⁴⁷ When protesters descended on the streets of Oranjestad at the end of May, makeshift posters warned female onlookers that "the government is looking for a new home for your husbands."⁴⁸ The Antillean press likewise predicted the impending dissolution of household harmony. One fictionalized story printed in *Amigoe di Curaçao* envisioned the nightmarish impact of a Campo Alegre on Aruban households, telling the story of two adolescent males who, until the opening of the brothel, had contentedly passed their evenings playing card games on the porch. On the first night the brothel opened its doors, the sons abandoned the porch and did not return home until midnight. On the second night, they did not return at all.⁴⁹ Echoing this perceived threat to Aruban masculinity, the conservative *Arubaanse Courant* cautioned in an open letter to the "women of Aruba" that Campo would deliver "great danger to the moral and physical welfare of our homes. A danger to our husbands, sons, fathers, brothers and boyfriends."⁵⁰

These repeated articulations of Campo's threat to Aruban males and masculinity—and women's alleged responsibility for male chastity—distinguish this abolitionist campaign from countless others. Unlike some struggles against prostitution throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, where middle-class feminist groups purportedly came to the rescue of "fallen

47 BNA, DAC, anonymous scrapbook, protest poster, n.d.

48 Quoted in "A Problem of Two Professions," *TIME*, June 18, 1951, n.p.

49 "Aruba: Verstoord gezins-geluk," *Amigoe di Curaçao*, May 17, 1957, n.p.

50 "Carta abierta a las damas de Aruba," *Arubaanse Courant*, n.d., n.p.

women,” Aruba’s protest movement rallied around a xenophobic rejection of sex workers and stressed the vulnerability of Aruban masculinity (Guy 1991; De Vries 1997; Walkowitz 1980). The vulnerability of Aruban manhood likewise emerges in official response to the protest. In questions posed to numerous medical professionals, police personnel, Lago managers and other island leaders, the committee formed to study prostitution on Aruba in May 1951 repeatedly asked how prostitution might imperil *male youth*. The idea that looser systems of regulation induced youthful male curiosity and offered “public lessons in seduction”⁵¹ guided the official defense of Aruba’s Campo Alegre in the government’s initial interactions with the protest movement. Again, the defense of male youth by some governing officials presented a dramatic change in emphasis from the 1942 committee formed to study prostitution on Curaçao, which authorized the regulation of prostitution on the grounds “that the cleanliness and virginity of many of our girls are in great danger of being lost.”⁵²

Whether such anxieties about masculinity were strategic or sincere is difficult to determine. What is clear, however, is that the protest movement was not the only party to express anxiety about the resilience of Aruban manhood. Island leadership, too, worried about rising male unemployment and overdependence on Lago, the island’s largest industry and employer. During the war, the Allied demand for oil drew an unprecedented number of Aruban males into employ at Lago—a practice that reversed the refinery’s earlier reliance on English-speaking foreign contract laborers. However, the end of the war and the eventual recovery of the European economy scaled back the wartime boom in Lago’s productivity as well as the demand for local labor.⁵³ By 1951, many officials cited rising unemployment, worsening economic conditions, and labor relations—especially pronounced during a massive strike at Lago in the summer of 1951⁵⁴—as the primary cause of slackening public morality. In meticulously plotted graphs, officials charted rising unemployment alongside increased reports of divorce, sexual violence, public drunkenness, theft,

51 “Het ‘Campo Alegre’ op Aruba: Antwoord van het Bestuur,” *Beurs- en Nieuwsberichten*, April 6, 1951, n.p. Lt. Governor L.C. Kwartz, who presided over the initial months of the *Campo* affair, stated this to the press.

52 ANA, BCAR 1951–1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, invr. nr. 544, DS-606–6, Recommendations of the Committee to Combat Prostitution and Venereal Disease, October 14, 1942.

53 The vast majority of Lago’s foreign employees, who constituted nearly half of the refinery’s workforce in 1951, were men of African descent from the Anglophone Caribbean (Alofs & Merckies 1990:114–15).

54 ANA, BCAR 1951–1961, Stukken betreffende het optreden bij massale werkstakingen, 1951–1957, invr. nr. 527.

and pregnancy out of wedlock.⁵⁵ In this way, too, official anxieties over public morality dovetailed with the protest movement's concerns, even as these groups at times differed in their thinking on how best to address the crises afflicting Aruban manhood.

The boom and subsequent bust years of the war and its immediate aftermath were disorienting if also ultimately transformative years for Aruba. If the war brought a dizzying sense of optimism to the island, the end of the war provoked broad uncertainties over how to best sustain these gains. The brief flurry of international attention that Aruba garnered in its important wartime role soon failed to captivate even metropolitan Dutch officials, who by the war's end focused their attention on the explosive conflicts unfolding in Indonesia's struggle for independence (Oostindie & Klinkers 2004:71–73). Changes in the economic landscape paired with disappointments on the political stage, including the failure of the Aruban separatist movement and the defeat of more moderate proposals to establish equivalence among Aruban and Curaçaoan seats in parliament, compounded for some the sense of Aruba's marginality and dependence. Undoubtedly these changes reached into Antillean households in vexing and personal ways. Such rationale might go a long way toward explaining how several thousand people came to be so convinced of the threat of Campo Alegre to members of their family and not, as it were, the thousands of anonymous sailors and foreign refinery workers whom the brothel was allegedly intended to serve. The protest movement's implicit promise of moral uprightness and its attendant aspiration of domestic harmony perhaps offered an empowering if idealistic message in an atmosphere of uncertainty and change. What's more, by late summer of 1951, the protest movement had succeeded where politicians failed: although Aruba would not become politically or economically autonomous that year, the protest movement had helped to forge an image of Aruban moral autonomy.

55 In these same conversations, some officials also connected Aruba's economic woes to its political status within the Netherlands Antilles. As an integral part of the Netherlands Antillean state, Aruba, like other islands within the Antillean constellation, was compelled to recognize the right of other Antillean islanders to live and work on Aruba. See ANA, BCAR 1951–1961, Eilandsraad Notulen 1951–1961, Minutes of the Island Council, August 1951. ANA, BCAR 1951–1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, invr. nr. 544, DS-606–6, report following the departure of foreign prostitutes by Hendrik Cornelis Willemsen, Police Commissioner on Aruba, May 12, 1955.

Aftermath and Conclusion

The 1951 protest against Campo Alegre on Aruba profoundly inflected the tenor of the island's sexual politics and the spirit of Aruban separatism. Testing the nascent mechanisms of the decolonizing state, the protest movement compelled public officials to halt plans to develop Campo Alegre and, by August 1951, to send away the island's foreign prostitutes. This victory for the protest movement came as a blow to those who profited from commercial sex on the island while also presenting a dilemma for local officials who lacked both the resources and the gumption to address the precipitous increase in domestic prostitution.⁵⁶ The conflicting interests of these various groups, and the ways in which each came into stunning conflict in the spring and summer 1951, has exerted a lasting influence on Aruba's treatment of commercial sex work. Specifically, the legacy of the protest movement of 1951 is most evident in the continued reticence of the island leadership to confront the "prostitution question" with a coherent policy of tolerance and regulation. Instead, in the years following the protest, officials responded ambiguously to aggrieved café owners in San Nicolas who, citing destitution and bankruptcy, demanded the return of foreign prostitutes.⁵⁷ By 1954, a significant number of foreign women had entered Aruba on two-week transit permits designated for "saleswomen" (*koopvrouwtoeristen*). Much like in the days before the Campo question emerged, these women headed for the streets of San Nicolas and clandestinely practiced their trade in the backrooms of bars and clubs.⁵⁸

56 ANA, BCAR 1951–1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, invr. nr. 347, DS-13468, Police Report, San Nicolas Brigade, August 12, 1952.

57 In December 1951, twenty café owners signed a letter pleading the lt. governor to permit each café "to import a pair of female workers [*krachten*] for the business," a move the Island Council at first passively tolerated and then, after 1957, sanctioned in the form of issuing three-month-long tourist visas to "adult entertainers." Quoted in ANA, BCAR 1951–1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, 1957–1960, invr. nr. 1.764, DS-65–10, Letter from twenty café owners to the Executive Council (Bestuurscollege) of Aruba, December 8, 1951.

58 The Police Commissioner on Aruba estimated in November 1955 that around thirty foreign women were present on Aruba as "saleswomen." Saleswomen were legally granted fourteen-day "transit permission" (*transitpermis*) on Aruba. The Police Commissioner also estimated that the number of domestic prostitutes had increased after 1951, claiming that seventy-eighty women from the Dutch Antilles worked as prostitutes on Aruba, thirty-three of whom came from Curaçao and allegedly only nine from Aruba. Cited in ANA, BCAR 1951–1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, 1957–1960, invr. nr. 1.764, DS-65–10, Attachments to the notes of the Island Council of Aruba, November 12, 1955.

The threat of protest lay behind any subtle move to invite foreign prostitutes back to Aruba. With the increased presence of saleswomen after 1954, familiar players in the protest movement, including Catholic women's associations and clergy, sent angry letters in defense of the "good name of Aruba."⁵⁹ This time, however, they were joined by a chorus of voices in newly established social welfare initiatives such as the Foundation for the Promotion of Mental Health on Aruba (Stichting ter Bevordering van de Geestelijke Volksgezondheid op Aruba) and the Aruban Foundation to Combat Alcohol Abuse (Stichting Bestrijding Alcoholmisbruik Aruba).⁶⁰ As Margo Groenewoud has also argued of the postwar period on Curaçao, economic modernization and the initiation of decolonization policy empowered actors to organize beyond the traditional framework of the Catholic Church, thus increasing the participation of secular associations in education, social work, and health care (Groenewoud 2014:61). And so it was within this diverse landscape of social actors in 1957 that the island government of Aruba quietly permitted a number of registered cafés to hire "adult entertainers" (*animeermeisjes*) from abroad. Though careful to never label these foreign entertainers as prostitutes in public, in private correspondence governing officials bluntly conceded that such semantic deceptions were necessary for resolving this hot-button and "centuries-old social question"⁶¹ on Aruba. Aruban officials defended the provisional return of such foreign entertainers, claiming that without these *animeermeisjes* the number of Curaçaoan prostitutes on Aruba would only increase.⁶²

Although Aruba did return to a minimally regulated system of prostitution after 1957, the protest movement can nevertheless be regarded as impactful on several counts. First, the absence of a Campo Alegre on Aruba testifies to the efficacy of the movement. Barring a centralized, regulated brothel from existing on Aruba was, after all, the original goal of the protest movement

59 ANA, BCAR 1951–1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, 1957–1960, invr. nr. 347, DS-13477, Letter from Liga di Maria to members of the Island Council of Aruba, August 10, 1955.

60 ANA, BCAR 1951–1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, 1957–1960, invr. nr. 1.764, DS-65–10, Letter from Aruban Foundation to Combat Alcohol Abuse to the Executive Council of Aruba, April 18, 1957; Letter from the Foundation to Promote Mental Health on Aruba to the Executive Council of Aruba, May 8, 1957 and May 21, 1957.

61 Quoted in ANA, BCAR 1951–1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, 1957–1960, invr. nr. 1.764, DS-65–10, Letter to the Minister of Justice of the Netherlands Antilles from the acting Lt. Governor of Aruba, n.d.

62 ANA, BCAR 1951–1961, Bestrijding der Onzedelijkheid, 1957–1960, invr. nr. 1.764, DS-65–10, Report from the Children and Vice Squad to the Police Commissioner of Aruba, July 23, 1960; and Attachments to the notes of the Island Council of Aruba, November 12, 1955.

and its primary reason for being. Second, the protest movement succeeded in establishing the terms of debate in 1951 and in the decades that followed, and compelled the local government to respond to the protest's demands using the very rhetoric of the protest movement itself. This was most evident in the local government's insistence after the protests of 1951 that any changes related to prostitution policy would benefit and protect the spirit of the Aruban nation. Lastly, the continued reticence to legally recognize foreign prostitutes on Aruba remains another striking legacy of the Campo Alegre protest. Though the system of regulation forged in 1957 has since undergone several significant changes—namely, the cordoning off of a red-light district in San Nicolas and the strict enforcement of weekly medical checkups with government doctors—sex workers are still recognized by the law as adult entertainers/*animeermeisjes* rather than as prostitutes. Some experts claim that the patchy system of regulation in the now small and deindustrialized town of San Nicolas, and the dubious terms under which foreign sex workers enter the island, have significantly raised prospects for human trafficking (Maduro 2013:47–48). While an analysis of contemporary concerns over prostitution on Aruba falls beyond the scope of this essay, it is nevertheless remarkable that the decisions resulting from the protest movement of 1951 and its aftermath have continued to hold sway on Aruba.

Two insights follow from this analysis of the Campo Alegre debate. First, by including actors often marginalized in traditional political histories of decolonization in the Antilles, the imbrication of sexual politics within other kinds of politics comes into stark relief. Locating the points of connection between the politics of decolonization, Aruban separatism and concerns over appropriate morality, gender roles, and ethnic and racial propriety helps to revise our understandings of decolonization and the subjects it traditionally involves. In the Campo protest of 1951, a legion of largely middle-class women powerfully channeled their hopes, fears, and anxieties through democratic processes. While theirs does not at first seem to be a struggle concerned with decolonization, the Campo debate tested the democratic reflexes of the postcolonial Dutch Antillean state at the same time that it gave vent to the anxieties produced by reformed political bonds.

Second, and not least, in powerfully marshaling a notion of a distinct Aruban identity, the protest movement fits not only within the tangled history of sexual politics on the island but perhaps most strikingly within the history of the island's struggle to extricate itself from the Antillean constellation. In their repeated appeals to a separate Aruban identity, participants in the 1951 protest movement—much like leading Aruban politicians—located the drama of colonialism not within the relationship between metropole and colony, but

among the islands themselves. In this way, the fight against Campo Alegre might also be regarded as a critical stage in the transformation of Aruban separatism from a political goal into a social project.

While the Campo Alegre protest may not fit easily alongside episodes of radical and revolutionary anticolonialism happening elsewhere in the colonial world, it merits attention precisely for the ways in which it departs from the received wisdom of empire's end. The Campo protest was not a displacement of attention away from the substantive issues of decolonization and colonial hierarchies, but, as I have hoped to demonstrate, an engagement within and against those very dynamics. Leveraging the evolving structures of the decolonizing state, the protest movement exploited the island's nonsovereign status to plead for intervention against an array of perceived enemies, whether foreign prostitutes, Curaçaoan sex workers, or leadership on both Aruba and Curaçao. At times, the movement's strategies stood at odds with its goals. Most notably, the protest movement railed against Aruban leadership even as it adopted and popularized notions of a distinct and precious Aruban identity shared by those very leaders. Indeed, what the Campo protest illustrates is not only the remarkable urgency of intercolonial conflict at empire's end, but also the incredible diversity of political possibilities emerging from imperial collapse. For the protest movement of 1951 as for the eventual leaders of Aruban autonomy, leveraging the multilayered structures of a commonwealth state seemed the most expedient way to protect "the soul of Aruba." While increased scholarly attention to these clever models of statehood has proven that independence was neither obvious nor preferred at empire's end, it is by reading across the fault lines of the political and the personal that we can broaden our view not only of the trajectory of decolonization, but its lived and deeply felt experience.

References

- Agard-Jones, Vanessa, 2012. What the Sands Remember. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 18(2–3):325–46.
- Alexander, M. Jacqui, 1994. Not Just (Any) *Body* Can Be a Citizen: The Politics of Law, Sexuality and Postcoloniality in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas. *Feminist Review* 48:5–23.
- Alofs, Luc, 1993. Publieke dames in een publiek debat: De geschiedenis van Campo Alegre op Aruba, 1950–1957. In G.F.M. Bossers, A.R.O. Ringeling & M. Tratnik (eds.), *Cinco años na camida: Opstellen aangeboden ter gelegenheid van het eerste lustrum van de Universiteit van Aruba*. Oranjestad: University of Aruba, pp. 21–32.

- Alofs, Luc, 2011. *Onderhorigheid en separatisme: Koloniaal bestuur en lokale politiek op Aruba, 1816–1955*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Leiden University, Leiden, the Netherlands.
- Alofs, Luc & Leontine Merckies, 1990. *Ken ta Arubiano? Sociale integratie en natievorming op Aruba*. Leiden, the Netherlands: KITLV Press.
- Bliss, Katherine Elaine, 2001. *Compromised Positions: Prostitution, Public Health, and Gender Politics in Revolutionary Mexico City*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Briggs, Laura, 2002. *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bonilla, Yarimar, 2013. Ordinary Sovereignty. *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 17(3):152–65.
- Bonilla, Yarimar, 2015. *Non-Sovereign Futures: French Caribbean Politics in the Wake of Disenchantment*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bourbonnais, Nicole, 2009. “Dangerously Large”: The 1938 Labor Rebellion and the Debate over Birth Control in Jamaica. *NWIG* 83(1&2):39–69.
- Caulfield, Sueanne, 1997. The Birth of the Mangu: Race, Nation, and the Politics of Prostitution in Rio de Janeiro, 1850–1942. In Daniel Balderston & Donna J. Guy (eds.), *Sex and Sexuality in Latin America*. New York: New York University Press, pp. 86–100.
- Chamberlain, Mary, 2010. *Empire and Nation-Building in the Caribbean: Barbados, 1937–66*. Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press.
- Collins, Michael, 2013. Decolonisation and the “Federal Moment.” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 24(1):21–40.
- Cooper, Frederick, 2008. Possibility and Constraint: African Independence in Historical Perspective. *The Journal of African History* 49(2):167–96.
- Cooper, Frederick, 2014a. *Africa in the World: Capitalism, Empire, Nation-State*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Cooper, Frederick, 2014b. *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945–1960*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Daily, Andrew M., 2014. Race, Citizenship, and Antillean Student Activism in Postwar France, 1946–1968. *French Historical Studies* 37(2):331–57.
- De Barros, Juanita, 2014. *Reproducing the British Caribbean: Sex, Gender, and Population Politics after Slavery*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Finch-Boyer, Héloïse, 2013. “The Idea of the Nation Was Superior to Race”: Transforming Racial Contours and Social Attitudes and Decolonizing the French Empire from La Réunion, 1946–1973. *French Historical Studies* 36(1):109–40.
- Findlay, Eileen J. Suárez, 1999. *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870–1920*. Durham NC: Duke University Press.
- Foray, Jennifer L., 2014. *Visions of Empire in the Nazi-Occupied Netherlands*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Galen, John Jansen, van 2013. *Afscheid van de koloniën: Het Nederlandse dekolonisatiebeleid, 1942–2012*. Amsterdam: Atlas Contact.
- Groenewoud, Margo, 2014. The Catholic Church in Modern (Post-) Colonial Curaçao: Aspects of Power Relations in Comparative Perspective. In Nicholas Faraclas, Ronald Severing, Christa Weijer, Elisabeth Echteld & Wim Rutgers (eds.), *Creole Connections: Transgressing Neocolonial Boundaries in the Languages, Literatures and Cultures of the ABC-Islands and the Rest of the Dutch Caribbean*. Willemstad: Fundashon pa Planifikashon di Idioma, University of Curaçao, pp. 57–69.
- Guy, Donna J., 1991. *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family and Nation in Argentina*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Hillebrink, Steven, 2008. *The Right to Self-Determination and Post-Colonial Governance: The Case of the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba*. The Hague: T.M.C. Asser Press.
- Hoefte, Rosemarijn, 2013. *Suriname in the Long Twentieth Century: Domination, Contestation, Globalization*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kempadoo, Kamala (ed.), 1999. *Sun, Sex, and Gold: Tourism and Sex Work in the Caribbean*. Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Kempadoo, Kamala, 2004. *Sexing the Caribbean: Gender, Race and Sexual Labor*. New York: Routledge.
- Kleijn, Mariëlle & Marlou Schrover, 2013. The Dutch State as a Pimp: Policies Regarding a Brothel on Curaçao (1945–1956). *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis* 10(3):33–54.
- Klinkers, Inge Augustus Johanna, 1999. De weg naar het Statuut: Het Nederlandse dekolonisatiebeleid in de Caraïben (1940–54) in vergelijkend perspectief. Ph.D. Dissertation, Utrecht University, Utrecht, the Netherlands.
- Koot, Willem & Anco Ringeling, 1984. *De Antillianen*. Muiderberg, the Netherlands: Dick Coutinho.
- Maduro, Letizia, 2013. *A Situational Analysis of Aruba's Response to Human Trafficking*. Geneva: International Organization for Migration.
- Mawby, Spencer, 2012. *Ordering Independence: The End of Empire in the Anglophone Caribbean, 1947–69*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- McCreery, David, 1986. "This Life of Misery and Shame": Female Prostitution in Guatemala City, 1880–1920. *Journal of Latin American Studies* 18(2):333–53.
- Meel, Peter, 1990. *Tussen autonomie en onafhankelijkheid: Nederlands-Surinaamse betrekkingen 1954–1961*. Leiden, the Netherlands: KITLV Press.
- Mooi, Annet, 1998. *Out of Otherness: Characters and Narrators in the Dutch Venereal Disease Debates, 1850–1990*. Trans. Beverly Jackson. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Moore, Brian L. & Michele A. Johnson, 2004. *Neither Led Nor Driven: Contesting British Cultural Imperialism in Jamaica, 1865–1920*. Mona, Jamaica: The University of the West Indies Press.
- Neptune, Harvey R., 2007. *Caliban and the Yankees: Trinidad and the United States Occupation*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

- Oostindie, Gert, 2005. *Paradise Overseas: The Dutch Caribbean: Colonialism and Its Transatlantic Legacies*. Oxford: Macmillan Caribbean.
- Oostindie, Gert & Inge Klinkers, 2001. *Knellende Koninkrijksbanden: Het Nederlandse dekolonisatiebeleid in de Caraïben, 1940–2000*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Oostindie, Gert & Inge Klinkers, 2003. *Decolonising the Caribbean: Dutch Policies in a Comparative Perspective*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Rush, Anne Spry, 2011. *Bonds of Empire: West Indians and Britishness from Victoria to Decolonization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sippial, Tiffany A., 2013. *Prostitution, Modernity, and the Making of the Cuban Republic, 1840–1920*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- Soest, Jaap, van 1977. *Olie als water: De Curaçaose economie in de eerste helft van de twintigste eeuw*. Zutphen, the Netherlands: Walburg Pers.
- Stoler, Ann Laura, 1995. *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*. Durham NC: Duke University Press.
- Vries, Petra, de 1997. *Kuisheid voor mannen, vrijheid voor vrouwen: De reglementering en bestrijding van prostitutie in Nederland, 1850–1911*. Hilversum, the Netherlands: Verloren.
- Walkowitz, Judith R., 1980. *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wekker, Gloria, 2006. *The Politics of Passion: Women's Sexual Culture in the Afro-Surinamese Diaspora*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Wilder, Gary, 2005. *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wilder, Gary, 2015. *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World*. Durham NC: Duke University Press.